THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ARUN JAITLEY): (a) to (c) During the Trade Policy Review of the European Union (EU) held in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on 24th and 26th July, 2002, members of the WTO, including India, underlined the adverse impact of EU's Common Agricultural Policy and trade distorting agricultural subsidies on their exports of agricultural products. India also expressed concern that to date the EU had lifted restrictions on only 20% of textiles products restricted in 1990, leaving the elimination of the remaining 80% of restricted imports "back-loaded" for the final stage at the end of 2004, an approach that went against the spirit of the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing. Concern was also expressed on the use of anti-dumping and countervailing duty action by the EU.

The WTO Secretariat Report for the Trade Policy Review of the European Union has observed that the simple average tariff on agricultural products is 16% which is about 4 times higher than that on non-agricultural products. Evidence of tariff escalation remains, in particular on processed products. For textiles, the Report has observed that tariffs well above the average apply to textiles and clothing products. The report has also noted that the EU has long maintained restrictions on imports of textile and clothing products from a number of developing countries and transition economies.

(d) India has been taking up the issue of barriers in access to EU markets in respect of textiles and agricultural products bilaterally with EU and with its member States, as well as at the WTO. The Government have also raised these issues at appropriate multilateral fora including during the ongoing negotiations at the WTO on market access for agricultural and non-agricultural products and in the Negotiating Group on Rules which is considering improvements and clarifications on the Anti-Dumping Agreement and the Subsidies Agreement. These negotiations are scheduled to be completed by January, 2005.

Applications pending before Income-tax Appellate Tribunals

*356. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI: Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that thousands of applications/petitions

are pending before various Income-Tax Appellate Tribunals throughout the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action being taken to expedite the process?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI ARUN JAITLEY): (a) and (b) As on 1st March, 2003, 1,82,793 cases were pending before the 53 benches of Income-tax Appellate Tribunal in the country.

(c) Following measures have been adopted to reduce pendency of cases in ITAT:

(i) Government sanctioned 15 additional benches for ITAT in 1997 and all these benches have been made functional.

(ii) Cases involving similar issues are clubbed; small cases and covered cases, i.e. cases covered by decisions of Hon'ble Supreme Court, High Courts and ITAT are identified and these cases are posted out of turn and disposed regularly.

(iii) The limit for appeals to be heard by Single Member has been raised from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 5 lakhs.

(iv) Direct filing of appeals in High Courts under amended provisions of Section 260 (A) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

(v) A special drive to dispose of Single Member Cases has been ordered by the President of ITAT, for all benches throughout the country where pendency is more with effect from 17.03.2003 for period of three weeks.

Import of Metro Rail technology from South Korea

*357. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY: Will the Minister of URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are importing Metro Rail technology from South Korea;

(b) whether it is also a fact that our experts in the said technology have migrated to foreign countries; and